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RUEHJI/AMCONSUL JEDDAH PRIORITY 0611
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY 0909
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UNCLAS TEL AVIV 002696

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR X0XX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO ICD
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PARIS ALSO FOR POL
ROME FOR MFO

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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Mideast

Key stories in the media:

All media reported on a violent day in Hebron yesterday, leading to the injury of 18 Israeli security personnel and settlers, including a 15-year-old boy whose skull was fractured after he was hit in the head by a rock. HaQaretz quoted the PA as saying that 20 Palestinians have been hurt in the clashes since Monday. The

settlers have inflicted significant damages to Palestinian property and vandalized mosques and tombstones. The area surrounding what has been dubbed the House of Contention, which the settlers are calling the House of Peace, was declared a closed military zone yesterday. HaQaretz reported that security forces are expected to carry out an evacuation of the house by the end of the week. Israel Radio and the leading Internet news service Ynet reported that this morning four Jews stabbed an Arab in Jerusalem.

All media reported that the Labor Party has postponed its primary election until tomorrow, after a series of technical malfunctions shut down its new touch-screen voting system yesterday. When party members return to vote again, they will use the old system -- placing paper voting slips in envelopes and dropping them into cardboard ballot boxes, to be counted by hand. The media reported that the glitch could have implications for Likud and Kadima, as both parties are also planning computerized primaries.

The Jerusalem Post reported that PA officials in Ramallah told the newspaper yesterday that the PA is planning to replace all the Hamas-controlled municipalities and village councils in the West Bank in the coming weeks. The officials were quoted as saying that the decision was aimed at undermining Hamas's influence in the West Bank and paving the way for the extension of PA President Mahmoud Abbas's term after it ends on January 9, 2009.

Major media reported that Martin Indyk, Director of the Saban Center at Brookings, and Richard Haass, President of the Council on Foreign Relations, proposed yesterday that President-elect Barack Obama should shift the main U.S. foreign policy focus in the Middle East from Iraq to curtailing Iran's nuclear program and promoting peace agreements between Israel and its Arab neighbors, including Syria. Israel Radio cited the concern of Israeli officials about the report's chapter on Iran.

Media reported that yesterday the Israel Air Force killed two Gazans in the Rafah area, in an air strike the army said targeted a Palestinian cell launching mortar shells at Kibbutz Kerem Shalom, which borders southern Gaza. Palestinians fired at least two Qassam rockets and five mortar shells at the western Negev yesterday, causing no injuries. HaQaretz and other media quoted Palestinian sources as saying that the fatalities were brothers, and that four others were hurt in the air strike, adding that the brothers and three of the other casualties were "youths." It appears they may have been sent by the organization that fired the rockets in order to dismantle the launcher.

HaQaretz reported that yesterday in Brussels FM Tzipi Livni spoke before the European Parliament and a meeting of NATO foreign ministers. The newspaper reported that following the meeting, Israel and NATO will deepen their relations. The Jerusalem Post reported that Israel is calling on the EU not to rush headlong into normalizing relations with an un-reformed Damascus.

Maariv reported that during his recent visit to New York, President Shimon Peres met with Sheikh Al-Azhar Muhammad Sayed Tantawi, the highest-ranking Muslim cleric in Egypt. However, in an official announcement released yesterday, Tantawi claimed: QI did not know whose hand I was shaking.

Media reported that businessman Nir Barkat will take over today from Jerusalem Mayor Uri Lupoliansky, who served six years in the post.

Citing yesterday's Wall Street Journal, The Jerusalem Post reported that Bank of Israel Governor Stanley Fischer may be a dark-horse candidate for the presidency of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York -- to replace Timothy Geithner.

The Jerusalem Post reported on QACRI Q Eyes, Q a 30-second public announcement that is a public service announcement created by ACRI, the Association for Civil Rights in Israel, as part of a three-week workshop sponsored by the State Department's Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI). The aim is to encourage non-government organizations (NGOs) to use the visual media to spread their messages. In addition to ACRI, six other Israeli organizations participated in the workshop, which ended this week. A U.S. Embassy official was quoted as saying that the workshop, which was facilitated by the nonprofit, New York-based production company Barefoot, was aimed at furthering social causes in the Middle East.

1. Iran:

Summary:

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: QThe best place to hit-the-ground-running is on the Iranian issue.... If Iran gets the bomb, Hamas and Hizbullah will be emboldened and Muslim moderates throughout the world will be marginalized. So, too, will the idea of taking risks for peace.

Block Quotes:

QTeam Obama

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (12/3): Q[ObamaQs] appointments sent a message that was, by and large, reassuring.... [Nonetheless,] the Obama administration can be expected to pursue the same fundamental U.S. Mideast policy that has been in place since 1967: finding the right modality to exchange land for peace.... As the Obama team takes over on January 20, neither Palestinians nor Israelis will be in a position to make substantive negotiating progress. Israel will be in post-election diplomatic limbo, while the Palestinian polity will still be physically divided and politically fragmented. So the best place to hit-the-ground-running is on the Iranian issue.... If Obama shows himself truly committed to preventing the apocalypse-seeking Tehran regime from going nuclear, if he rejects the notion that the mullahs can be managed via deterrence, he will lead his team in pressing for full bore sanctions, backed by the threat of force as a last resort. This does not preclude talking to Iran. It only means he'd have their full attention. If Iran gets the bomb, Hamas and Hizbullah will be emboldened and Muslim moderates throughout the world will be marginalized. So, too, will the idea of taking risks for peace.

2. Mideast:

Summary:

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: QIsrael has many QassetsQ in its hands -- more than 11,000 prisoners, some of whom could certainly be exchanged for Gilad Shalit.

Former Foreign Minister Shlomo Ben-Ami wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: QObamaQs election is a revolutionary landmark in the history of America, which cannot be allowed to dissipate due to excessive expectations.

American-born historian and journalist Gershom Gorenberg wrote in Ha'aretz: Q[The late Moshe] Dayan didn't learn from the experience of other nations. Netanyahu wants to recycle the failure of his own nation.

Block Quotes:

I. "The Folly of the Detentions"

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (12/3): QAbducting people solely for bargaining, whether in Lebanon or the territories, cannot be accepted as a legitimate part of the struggle being led by the government. That is the way of terror organizations. Israel has many QassetsQ in its hands -- more than 11,000 prisoners, some of whom could certainly be exchanged for Gilad Shalit. The stalled negotiations for his release must be revived quickly and sincerely, with Israel knowing full well the price of his welfare. The state must immediately speed up the negotiations, offer the necessary price, and stop the superfluous nickel-and-diming. Shalit must come home.

II. QHot Potato for the President

Former Foreign Minister Shlomo Ben-Ami wrote in the

mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (12/3): QBarack ObamaQs plans for the Middle East represent a welcome shift away from the idea that the ills of regions suffering from dysfunction should be treated by Qconstructive chaos.Q But it is very possible that the far-reaching promises of the new U.S. president will also prove to be unrealistic. ObamaQs agenda is breathtaking.... The magnitude of the task should be examined versus the depressing legacy of the Middle East, which is fraught with confrontations. The entire region is undergoing a dangerous process of extremism, while a growing chain of organizations, mainly radical Muslim groups, are opposed to the very existence of an orderly state.... Obama may understand fairly quickly that his schedule for a withdrawal from Iraq is simply unrealistic. A quick U.S. disengagement could end in a disintegration of the country into fragments of political entities, one of which could certainly be a Muslim republic controlled by Iran.... As for Iran, the new U.S. president may return to a strategy of military pressure much sooner than he wants: Iran has no intention of deviating from its progress towards nuclear status. The Middle East poses an almost impossible task to Obama: To deal with historical and political ills while the United States he inherited no longer enjoys a status of unquestioned hegemony, while it and its allies are immersed in the most severe economic crisis since 1929.... ObamaQs election is a revolutionary landmark in the history of America, which cannot be allowed to dissipate due to excessive expectations. His idealistic urge will have to be moderated in light of the United StatesQ limited power at present. The challenge that faces his foreign policy is not to change the Middle East but rather to repair it, and by the good old diplomatic means. If the goal is thus defined, the fulcrum for achieving it is resolving the Israeli-Arab conflict in general and the Palestinian issue in particular. Obama will have to start keeping his promise to deal with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict Qfrom the moment I am sworn inQ without wasting time.... There is no need to reinvent the wheel.

III. "Dayan as Tragedy, Bibi as Farce"

American-born historian and journalist Gershom Gorenberg wrote in Ha'aretz (12/3): QStraightforwardly, [the late Moshe] Dayan sought to establish a colonial regime, supposedly benevolent. Israel would rule; the natives would work, study and be happy with their lot.... But his proposal treated the Palestinians practically as different species: They would be satisfied with economic improvements and wouldn't seek political expression as individuals or a collective.... Netanyahu's platform is a con game twice over. Palestinians will not abandon their demand for independence because of economic growth. And given the absolute lack of free movement in the territories, even a colonial economy can't grow there. The question is what will happen first: a new violent confrontation or an international economic boycott.... Still, there's a difference between Dayan and Netanyahu: Dayan didn't learn from the experience of other nations. Netanyahu wants to recycle the failure of his own nation. Perhaps that's the difference between tragedy and farce.

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